

## Beast of Bladenboro

From Wikipedia:

The Beast of Bladenboro refers to the creature responsible for a string of deaths amongst Bladenboro, North Carolina animals in the winter of 1953-54. According to witnesses and trackers it was likely a wildcat, but the uncertain nature of its identity lends itself to cryptozoology. It was known to most commonly crush or decapitate its victims, which were mostly dogs.

Possibly related to the Bladenboro incidents, a dog was found dead in Clarkton, North Carolina (about eight miles from Bladenboro), killed by what Police Chief Roy Fores reported witnesses as describing as "sleek, black, about 5 feet long...." on December 29, 1953.

On December 31, two dogs belonging to a Bladenboro man named Johnny Vause were found dead. There was reportedly a significant amount of blood at the scene near their kennels. The two dogs were "torn into ribbons and crushed," according to Vause.

" My dogs put up a good fight. There was blood all over the porch, big puddles of it. And there was a pool of saliva on the porch. It killed one dog at 10:30 and left it lying there. My dad wrapped the dog up in a blanket. That thing came back and got that dog and nobody's seen the dog since. At 1:30 in the morning, it came back and killed the other dog and took it off. We found it three days later in a hedgerow. The top of one of the dogs heads was torn off and its body was crushed and wet, like it had been in that thing's mouth. The other dog's lower jaw was torn off."

— Johnny Vause

On the next day, January 1, 1954, two more dogs were found dead in Bladenboro at Woodie Storm's farm. One was "sort of eaten up," according to a witness.

On the night of January 2, a farmer named Gary Callahan reported

that a dog of his had been killed.

Two more dogs were found dead on January 3. One of the dogs was autopsied, and according to Police Chief Roy Fores "...there wasn't more than two or three drops of blood in him [...] The victim's bottom lip had been broken open and his jawbone smashed back." Fores also said of the dogs found dead so far, "The ear of one dog was gnawed off and the tongues of two had been chewed out."

According to The Charlotte News, on the night of the 5th a pet rabbit was found "cleanly decapitated and still warm." On January 7, a dead dog was found in a pasture near the Bladenboro swamp.

Julian "Tater" Shaw, who owned a local gas station, heard that a goat had died in a strange way and traveled to the edge of town to see for himself. According to him, "His head was flat as a fritter [...] it had a great big ol' track... It was weird." Shaw also claimed that whatever killed the goat killed cows and hogs.

Resident Malcolm Frank reported seeing the animal crossing the street. He described it as "about four and a half feet long, bushy, and resembling either a bear or a panther," according to the January 4th edition of the Wilmington Morning Star. A son of a Bladenboro man named Carl Pate reported seeing the monster as well on the night of January 3. According to him, "it was small, and a little one just like it was running beside it." A third sighting on January 3rd was reported by James Pittman: "[...] about 11:00 o'clock I heard a strange noise outside my window, like a baby crying." He went outside to follow the noise for "close to a mile [...] I saw bushes moving, but I never did actually see whatever it was. However, I think it must have been close to 150-pounds, the way it went through the bushes."

Around 8 o'clock in the evening on January 4, Lloyd Clemmons claims to have seen the beast. The following account, reported in the Wilmington Morning Star, contains a physical description.

"I got two dogs, Niggy, the little black one, and Peewee, a

brown one, that's bigger. Me and my wife were sitting here in the living room. We heard the dogs get awful restless. My front light was on and Larry Moore [...] had his back light on. I glanced out the window and saw this thing. It had me plumb spellbound. It was bout 20 inches high. It had a long tail, about 14 inches. The color of it was dark. It had a face exactly like a cat. Only I ain't ever seen a cat that big. It was walking around stealthy, sneaky, moving about trying to get to Niggy and Peewee. I jumped for my shotgun and loaded it and went out to shoot it, but it moved into the darkness right away and I couldn't find him again."

A group of hunters from Wilmington including S. W. Garret, G. V. Garret, and Joe Gore spent that night tracking the creature for three miles around swampland. According to them, the tracks showed claws at least an inch long and indicated an 80 lb. to 90 lb. animal. The beast's circling movement suggested it might have had offspring or a mate nearby, the hunters said. During the early hours of January 5, Chief Fores and one D.G. Pait witnessed the beast attacking a dog from a hundred or so feet away.

According to them, the dog ran away, yelping, and was not found. Pait also reported seeing tracks along a creek bank near one of the attack sites. He said that there were two sets of prints, and one was smaller. Later that day, in the early evening, Mrs. C. E. Kinlaw went to her front porch upon hearing whimpering dogs. She saw what she described as looking like "a big mountain lion" near the dogs, three houses down. The creature ran toward her, but turned and fled when she screamed. Outside her home, the tracks left in the dirt road were "bigger than a silver dollar" according to Police Chief Fores.

"After we first saw it, and my husband [scared it away], it circled back and came running toward the porch where I was standing. I screamed and it stopped on all fours, turned and ran off. [...] You know, the Bible speaks of sights and wonders before the end of time. This could be one of them. The Bible's coming true, day by day."

— C. E. Kinlaw

A young boy named Dalton Norton reported seeing what he called "a big cat" on January 6. According to him: "We heard a noise on the porch [...] whatever it was made a noise like a baby crying. It jumped off the porch and I watched it through the window. It went over to one house, then went off towards another and I didn't see it anymore."

On January 11, two cars stopped for an animal reported to be four feet long. Jeff Evers, one of the men in the cars, was quoted as saying the animal had "runty-looking ears" and being "brownish and tabby." Fores said the animal "really upset the women. They were wringing their hands and like that."

The night of January 3, Police Chief Roy Fores searched for the creature with his dogs, but they reportedly would not follow the trail.

"A half-dozen brave youths" and their dogs spent January 4 searching for the creature responsible for the deaths. That night, Police Chief Roy Fores and eight to ten other officers conducted their own hunt. Hunters who traveled to Bladenboro from Wilmington also searched for the beast that evening, reportedly tracking it for 3 miles around the swamp.

On the night of January 5, more than 500 people and dogs hunted through the woods and swamps for the creature.

On January 6, more than 800 people turned out to hunt for the beast in the swamps. Fores planned to tie up dogs as bait to lure the creature in. This particular plan was called off, and the hunt itself was also ended by officials as safety became a concern.

On January 7, another 800 to 1,000 people gathered to hunt the creature.

During the evening of the 8th, four fraternity brothers from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill were the only reported hunters. Mayor Fussell officially called off the hunt unless the creature made another obvious kill or there was a legitimate

sighting. The armed hunting parties of previous nights had become too large for safety, and Fores received a telegram from a humane society in Asheville, North Carolina protesting his plan to stake out dogs as bait for the creature.

In an interview with Amy Hotz for Star News, Julian "Tater" Shaw recalled, "Everybody was scared. Everybody, near 'bout, that had a gun was carrying it. [...] Anyhow, it was getting so bad, it was getting in the newspapers and the radio [...] There came hunters from all over, I mean big hunters." Another gas station owner, Jabe Frink, said the panic "[...] kept snowballing and snowballing. It got so nobody would walk out on the street at night."

Luther Davis, a local farmer, produced a dead bobcat on January 13. He found the bobcat struggling with a steel trap in Big Swamp, four miles from the city, at 6:00AM. He proceeded to shoot it in the head at about 8:30AM. Woodrow Fussell, the mayor of Bladenboro, told newspapers that the beast of Bladenboro had been found and killed. According to Gallehugh, however, it was unlikely that such a small cat could have killed and mangled the dogs. On the same day, Bruce Soles from Tabor City was leaving Bladenboro when he hit a cat with his vehicle. According to reports, it was "spotted like a leopard," about 20 to 24 inches high, and weighed between 75 and 90 pounds. He took the cat home with him to Tabor City.

Yet a third man is credited in some newspapers as having killed the animal. There are conflicting newspaper reports about whether it was Davis's or "professional hunter and guide" Berry Lewis's cat that Mayor Fussell photographed and sent out to the press. According to Corey, from The Carolina Farmer, Lewis was hunting in a different part of Bladen county when he shot and killed his bobcat.